

Random Encounters The Itinerant Bazaar

By Stan!



Market Day

Sometimes the most difficult task an adventurer faces in preparing for a quest is finding some place to buy all the necessary equipment. Only the largest of medieval cities can generate enough business to support all the various shops and merchants an adventurer might have need of. Smaller towns and villages have only one or two specialty shops -- usually determined by the needs of the citizens or a nearby customer base, such as a military garrison. Everything else must be bought through a general store or traveling merchants. Both these sources have only a limited supply of any particular item, but they often take special orders and can usually acquire the goods in a few weeks or months.



Many villages, towns, and cities also host Market Days on a regular basis (generally anywhere from once a week to once per month). This is a day when any merchant or artisan can come into town and set up a stall from which to sell his or her wares. This way, the citizens can buy from a wider array of shops and specialists than their town can support, and the merchants can make a living even though there isn't an overwhelming need for their services in any one place.

A particular town's Market Day usually features the same merchants each time. Their wares change based on seasonal needs or crops, but the same faces can be seen on a month-to-month basis. Occasionally, a new face will show up -- a stranger selling rare or unique items. And, once in a very great while, a group of traveling merchants show up together and transform an ordinary Market Day into an event that will be talked about for years to come.

One such band of traveling merchants has come to be known as the Itinerant Bazaar.

The Itinerant Bazaar

The Itinerant Bazaar is a band of merchants who deal in all sorts of exotic and rare goods -- everything from spices to weapons and armor. They arrive without preamble in a town early in the morning of a Market Day. In some cases, this group may outnumber the regular merchants by as many as two to one. Generally each merchant has one or more wagons that can be converted quickly into elaborate booths and displays.

The members of the Itinerant Bazaar are quite friendly to all the locals, including the regional competition. In fact, they make it a practice to avoid direct competition with the local merchants refrain from selling goods that are identical to those offered by someone who regularly attends that particular Market Day. What's more, the Itinerant Bazaar is said to have phenomenally low prices -- so low, in fact, that local merchants often buy from them in bulk at the end of the Market Day so that they can provide the suddenly popular items in the weeks to come.

There is no telling where the Itinerant Bazaar will turn up next. It arrives in a town without any warning. Indeed nobody knows for sure how the merchants knew there was going to be a Market Day. They simply show up at the crack of dawn, spend the day selling their wares, and then ride out in the gloom of dusk.

More interesting, unlike other traveling merchants, the bazaar does not visit more than a single Market Day in a particular region. Even when there is another market -- even a bigger, more profitable one -- coming up soon in a neighboring town, the Itinerant Bazaar passes it by. Their wagons roll out of town, not to be seen again for a very long time. In fact, for many small towns, a visit from the Itinerant Bazaar becomes the stuff of legends -- the Day of Plenty, or the Golden Market Day.

Although it is generally believed that the bazaar visits a particular Market Day only once, PCs who get curious and ask the right questions may discover one or more of the following facts.

- The bazaar occasionally does visit the same Market Day more than once, but there is always a span of at least 50 years between visits. (That is a long time for humans, but elves may well remember five or ten different visits by the bazaar in their lifetimes.)
- The merchants in the bazaar never sell any items that originate in the area they are visiting. They sell goods only from far away lands.
- No one has ever seen the Itinerant Bazaar on the road -- only when they roll into a town.

- Wizards or adventurers who can travel great distances magically claim to have seen the Itinerant Bazaar on consecutive days at opposite ends of a continent (or even on different continents).

How Do They Do That?

The Itinerant Bazaar does not travel by normal means. Indeed, the bazaar is not technically of this world. Its proprietors hail from the Plane of Shadow, and the bazaar is headquartered there. The other merchants come from all over the planes, though the proprietors insist that merchants pass as indigenous peoples wherever the bazaar goes. A great many of them were once local merchants who, when the Itinerant Bazaar visited, requested to join the organization (though most of them didn't actually understand at the time what exactly that entailed).

Although it is an extraplanar organization, the Itinerant Bazaar does all its business on the Material Plane. The proprietors have no wish to get involved in planar politics -- they just want to use their knowledge of the planes to make money from the people of the Material Plane.

Shadow Wagons: All the wagons associated with the bazaar are enhanced so that they can travel freely between the Plane of Shadow and the Material Plane during the hour preceding dawn and dusk. Anyone or anything on or touching the wagon is likewise transported. If a passenger or piece of cargo is incapable of making the transition (for example, a character who is the subject of a *dimensional anchor* spell) the wagon and the rest of its cargo fades out around him, her, or it. While the wagon goes to the Plane of Shadow, it leaves the affected character or item on the Material Plane.

Moderate illusion; CL 6th; Craft Wondrous Item, shadow walk; Price 12,000 gp; Weight 400 lb.

To avoid drawing too much attention to the bazaar, its proprietors use the following guidelines when planning its schedule.

1. Never visit a given location more than once every fifty years
2. After visiting a location, there must be a minimum of one month's time before visiting any other location within one hundred miles.
3. Whenever possible do not visit the same continent twice in the same ten-day period.

How to Find the Bazaar

The Itinerant Bazaar's schedule can be very confusing, particularly to anyone who is not used to thinking of his or her world on a global scale, and even more so to anyone who has no experience with planar travel. However, with a little bit of information and a good deal of luck, characters may predict the movements of the bazaar.

The first thing a character must know is the dates and locations of at least four places the Itinerant Bazaar has visited in the past six months. Then he or she may attempt a Gather Information check (DC 50) which, if it succeeds, allows the character to determine the next three locations the bazaar will visit. This check receives an insight bonus equal to the number of ranks the character has in Knowledge (the planes). It also receives a +10 circumstance bonus if one of the locations is more than two thousand miles away from the nearest other. Finally the check gains a +5 competence bonus if the character has actually attended the bazaar in the last six months. (If he or she has attended the bazaar more than once, the competence bonus is equal to 5 times the number of attendances.)

Bringing the Parts Together

Although random encounters usually happen by chance, some DMs may wish to tie these four parts together into something that could lead to further adventures. You've read about the bazaar in a general sense, and now you can introduce the concept of it to your game. (Perhaps the PCs have heard rumors of an unusual bazaar in the region that showed up several months ago but that had an item that they're seeking.) If you want further details, though, watch for more on NPCs, rules, and items in upcoming installments.

Coming in Part 2 of the Itinerant Bazaar

Read about the proprietors of the bazaar!

